

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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P 211530Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6950
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
USLO RIYADH
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
USUN 802

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: SOPN, PEPR, SY , UR
SUBJ: SOVIET UNION VIEWED AS "STRATEGIC ALLY"

1. MEDIA PLAY GIVEN TO ASSAD'S CURRENT VISIT TO SOVIET UNION IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THAT WHICH CHARACTERIZED HIS APRIL 1977 VISIT. AT THAT TIME SYRIAN MEDIA WAS PROUDLY TRUMPETING THE BALANCED RELATION WHICH PERMITTED SYRIA TO DEAL FROM POSITION OF INDEPENDENCE WITH BOTH SUPERPOWERS.

2. CURRENT EDITORIAL COMMENTARIES AND ANALYSIS IN SYRIAN MEDIA MAKE IT CLEAR THAT SYRIA NOW SEES SOVIET UNION AS "STRATEGIC ALLY" IN ITS EFFORTS TO "FOIL THE PLOT (US-ISRAELI-
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SADAT) AGAINST THE ARAB NATION." IMPORTANCE OF GOOD BILATERAL SYRO-SOVIET RELATIONS REPEATEDLY STRESSED. WHILE READERS REMINDED THAT SUCH RELATIONS ARE UNDERTAKEN ON BASIS "OF INDEPENDENCE AND MUTUAL RESPECT," THEME IS MUTED COMPARED WITH ASSAD'S 1977 VISIT. ONE EDITORIAL WRITER ASSERTS THAT WORLD ONLY RESPECTS STRENGTH, AND THE SOVIET UNION IS A STRONG ALLY. A SOMEWHAT LESS

OFFICIAL NEWS ANALYSIS ACCUSES US OF "ABSOLUTE SUPPORT FOR THE ZIONIST STATE AND OF TOTLA DISREGARD FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS." OTHER ANALYSES INDICATE FEAR OF AN ISRAELI ATTACK ON SYRIA IS ALSO PLAYING A LARGE ROLE IN SYRIA'S THINKING.

3. COMMENT: VIRTUALLY NO CLUES ARE GIVEN AS TO WHAT SYRIA EXPECTS SPECIFICALLY TO GAIN FROM THE VISIT. RECENT SPEECHES BY SYRIAN LEADERS, HOWEVER, HAVE ASSERTED THAT SYRIA WISHES TO BUILD UP A FORCE CAPABLE OF DEFENDING ALONE AGAINST AN ISRAELI ATTACK IF NECESSARY. SYRIANS ARE RARELY LACKING FOR SELF-ASSUREDNESS, BUT THEY MAY WELL BE SEEKING AN INCREASED SOVIET OPERATIONAL INVOLVEMENT IN FIELDS SUCH AS AIR DEFENSE UNTIL SYRIAN ARMED FORCES CAN ADEQUATELY ABSORB INCREASED AND UPDATED MILITARY WEAPONRY COMING INTO THE COUNTRY.
MURPHY

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